

CITY OF BELLEVUE
EASTGATE/I-90
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

September 29, 2011
5:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carrie Courter Blanton, Tom Bohman, Lindy Bruce, Dave Elliott, Jay Hamlin, Francois Larrivee, Mark Ludtka, Tom Perea, Rob Pucher, Jim Stanton, John Stokes, Cynthia Welti

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jeffrey Hummer, Rachel Solemsaas

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Jennifer Robertson

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Transportation; Mike Bergstrom, Paul Inghram, Planning & Community Development

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Call to Order

Co-Chair Larrivee called the meeting to order at 5:41 p.m.

2. Approval of September 8, 2011, Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Ms. Bruce. Second was by Mr. Bohman and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Discussion of Evaluation of Draft Alternatives Report

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz acknowledged that at the September 8 meeting a lot of ground was covered with regard to the transportation assessment. He noted that consultant Jim Ellison was present to respond to any questions relating to the modeling work that was done and his identification of potential solutions for chokepoints in the corridor.

Senior Planner Mike Bergstrom said following completion of the evaluation of the alternatives, the focus will turn to developing the preferred alternative at the October 6 meeting of the CAC. Development of the preferred alternative will continue through the end of the year and will culminate in a final report to the City Council in January.

Mr. Bergstrom noted that the draft alternatives report is lacking Appendix B, an economic analysis of specific redevelopment scenarios in the corridor developed by a consultant. The consultant looked at three specific properties in the corridor to see what makes sense from a financial performance standpoint. The consultant concluded that residential on the vacant King County parcel in the light industrial district is not feasible. Office could work there, but to go beyond a low-rise building surrounded by surface parking would require structured parking, which drives up the cost. In order to make that

type of building work might require a reduction in the parking requirement from the current four stalls per thousand square feet of building to three stalls.

Mr. Bohman said in his professional life he engages in office leasing and in fact leased the buildings adjacent to the King County site which have structured parking. He said he always envisioned the King County site constructed with under-building parking because of the natural contours of the site. Three stalls per thousand is not very practical in terms of office; four per thousand can very easily be made to work.

Co-Chair Hamlin asked if the consultant reached any conclusions about the notion of siting big box retail on the site. Mr. Bergstrom said both the economic consultants and the architects concluded that the King County site is not desirable for retail generally. Big box retail, however, seems to do well wherever it is located so it cannot be ruled out, though the size of the site is at the low end of what big box retail requires.

Regarding the Lincoln Executive Center site, the consultant analyzed the proposal shared with the CAC in previous meetings by the property manager, Urban Renaissance Group (URG), and reached conclusions similar to those reached by URG. The first phase of that proposal, which includes purchasing and tearing down the Bank of America building, constructing a large parking garage, and constructing two new office towers will not of itself perform well financially. However, later phases of the proposal would be profitable. With regard to the Eastgate Plaza site, the consultant found that the center is fully occupied, is getting good rents, is performing well, and is owned by a company that is in it for the long term. They concluded that redevelopment of the site is unlikely.

With regard to the notion of whether or not housing constructed adjacent to the freeways can work, Mr. Bergstrom noted that there are examples of successful residential developments located in close proximity to freeways. In New York, an apartment complex constructed in the 1960s is in fact built over a freeway.

Mr. Bohman said the residential expert in his office was able to point out a number of very successful residential developments located next to freeways, including one in Portland that just sold for a record price. The driver is proximity to amenities.

Co-Chair Hamlin said he was aware of a residential development in Dallas, Texas, that is right next to a freeway. He said there is a transit stop nearby and shopping areas are close as well. The development has been successful.

Mr. Bergstrom shared with the CAC photos of an example in Denver, Colorado, in an area served by light rail. In the first stage there is a complex that includes 431 rental units, and in the second stage there will be 140 condominiums. Their advertising brochures actually point out the fact that the units are adjacent to the freeway. Student housing developed for the University of Colorado is also adjacent to the freeway.

Mr. Stanton commented that there has been a continuing progression of sophistication in the application and use of roundabouts. In many instances they have been successful, but some have been less than successful, particularly with regard to bicycle traffic using them. The multilane roundabout in Issaquah at East Lake Sammamish at the base of 228th Street has been found to have significant design flaws relative to the tapering of ramps on the external portions of the roundabout where the intent was to allow traffic to pass through the peripheral of the roundabout without having to go through it. What they have found is that the merging process was not appropriately designed and is in fact creating an unsafe situation. To simply propose roundabouts generally would be the wrong approach; at a minimum a roundabout should be tested in one area to see if it will

work, particularly where multilane roundabouts are contemplated.

With regard to Figure D on page 11, Mr. Stanton pointed out that queuing for the eastbound ramp is a significant issue, particularly for traffic coming from the west and navigating through the 148th Avenue SE weave to get onto the freeway. He suggested that alternatives are needed for drivers to go eastbound on I-90, such as finding a way to bifurcate the traffic, with some getting on the freeway at the current location and some getting on further to the east.

Mr. Loewenherz said the intent behind considering roundabouts was to provide the committee with a variety of options. The traditional approach has been to widen intersections to accommodate additional volumes in the case of chokepoints. Several of the evaluation criteria compete with each other, such as place making, safety, and making the corridor generally more aesthetically appealing to the community. Admittedly poor roundabout designs can be disastrous, as is the case with poorly designed signalized intersections. That said, when designed correctly, roundabouts do a very good job of accommodating vehicle volumes safely and have additional place making advantages that might be appropriate in the Eastgate study area.

Comprehensive Planning Manager Paul Inghram said the CAC does not necessarily need to weigh in with a determination that roundabouts are good or bad. In part, the report intends to signify that there are different options and different solutions for managing chokepoint intersections.

Mr. Stanton agreed that roundabouts are one tool in the toolbox, but said they should not be considered to be the only tool. He added that under any scenario free-flowing traffic probably will not be the final result; there will continue to be peak periods during which traffic flows will be high and congestion the norm. Of prime importance will be ensuring safety for all modes of travel.

Mr. Jim Ellison, P.E. the consultant who helped analyze the effect of the No Action and three Action alternatives on the roadway network, said the modeling work showed that roundabouts could be made to work at intersections in the study area. The simulation that was done by the Washington State Department of Transportation was done at a macro level, not the design level, but clearly the work shows that the blush test was met, thus the concepts were included in the report as a possibility. The city's Department of Transportation is in the process of drafting a policy aimed at determining when roundabouts at any particular location are appropriate.

Mr. Stanton said roundabouts are a legitimate tool, but it should be used judiciously.

Mr. Elliott said the roundabout developed by Woodinville up the street from St. Michelle winery was intended to accommodate the proposed wine village which has since gone bankrupt. The design, however, is flawed. It contains two lanes and drivers entering the roundabout are not always aware of how the facility is to be used. It does carry a lot of traffic and would be a good one to study. Mr. Ellison said if properly designed, drivers should not have to be changing lanes once they are in a roundabout.

Mr. Ellison clarified that Figure G in the report represents a concept only. He added that not every intersection needs to have a roundabout; some can be signalized intersections. The intersections of 150th Avenue SE and SE 37th Street, and 150th Avenue SE at SE 38th Street, are so close together that they probably should not be mixed and matched; they should either both be signalized or both be roundabouts. The modeling work done by WSDOT indicated that under the 2030 volumes the roundabouts on 150th Avenue SE

would need some signal metering in order to force the gaps and avoid very long queues.

Ms. Courter Blanton asked if the roundabouts would require additional right-of-way to be acquired or if the various intersections already have a footprint sufficient to not affect neighboring properties. Mr. Ellison said typically roundabouts require more right-of-way than traditional signalized intersections. At Eastgate and 150th Avenue SE there is little or no additional right-of-way required given what the city owns and what the state owns. The WSDOT analysis looked at the other intersections and concluded that a roundabout could be fit into the existing right-of-way. However, the picture is much different at the 150th Avenue SE and SE 38th Street intersection where things are very tight with regard to right-of-way.

Mr. Ellison suggested that currently there is a lack of a good transition between the state freeway system and the city's streets. He said he reviewed the data provided by the city with regard to vehicle speeds and accident history and found that the higher speeds in the study area are in the overpass and ramp areas. People tend to have a pretty aggressive viewpoint as to how to drive as they come from the freeway and access the city streets, and when coming off city streets in a bid to get onto the freeway. One recommendation is to seek opportunities to better design a transitional feel so that drivers are given cues that they are entering a much different driving environment. One way that can be accomplished is with a boulevard concept, including median placements and landscaping treatments on the sides of the roads. Another option is to construct roundabouts at the ramp terminals.

Mr. Loewenherz said WSDOT is paying to have a new roundabout constructed at the Lakemont interchange; it is set to be completed in 2013, after which time additional data on how well the concept works will become available. The location has an extensive crash history, and the anticipation is that the roundabout will improve both traffic flow and reduce the number of accidents. Roundabouts yield far more planted medians which contributes to the overall greening of an area. While they improve traffic flow generally, roundabouts really shine during off-peak times.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Welti, Mr. Loewenherz noted that Appendix F in the report addresses transit service recommendations for the corridor. He noted that the recommendations involve revising the route network to serve Bellevue College more directly. According to the consultant, the net result would be an increase of 4,800 hours of transit service and 5 additional buses required for the corridor.

Co-Chair Larrivee asked the Committee members to share their views about the alternatives.

Co-Chair Hamlin said his preference would be for a mix between Alternatives 1 and 3. He said there are some strong residential neighborhoods surrounding the study area and said he would like to see the corridor scaled up but not too much, but striving for compatibility between the residential areas and the more intense commercial areas. He said he was bothered by the fact that the area has multiple focus points; the ones around the transit center and the college are clear, but the one around the intersection at 148th Avenue SE and parts toward the east is less clear and does not feel quite right, especially with regard to a gateway treatment.

Mr. Stokes concurred. He said while there are elements of Alternative 3 that should be incorporated, his primary support was for the vision of Alternative 1. The recession will eventually end and going forward a combination of Alternatives 1 and 3 offer the best vision for the area. He agreed that the alternatives do not fully capture what it will take

to make the area a place to which people are drawn, nor do they in a comprehensive way deal with the need for parks, open space and recreation.

Mr. Stanton said he remained unclear with regard to the long-term potential for the area is. In its current configuration, the corridor is poorly designed. The way to make the area desirable will be to focus on the functional issues, which will lead to the area becoming more desirable over time. The area is viable from a commercial standpoint, particularly from an incubator standpoint. He said he personally would not want to live in a housing unit constructed adjacent to the freeway. Providing a better way to navigate through the area and improving access to and from the freeway will be very important.

Mr. Perea said the process has been very enlightening. He said as a resident of the Eastgate area and the owner of a business in the corridor he is excited about the possibilities. He noted his support for combining Alternatives 1 and 3 and said he would like to see more retail and more things for the local community to do. He said he was not opposed to allowing taller buildings or to bringing in more housing, though he added he was not sure the area was ready for housing adjacent to the freeway. With transit serving the area, the corridor will be able to accommodate much higher densities.

Ms. Welti noted that for the most part it will take many years to realize the vision for the area and asked if some things could be done in the short term, such as landscaping the interchanges and rezoning to allow a coffee shop by Bellevue College. She stated she likes the Alternative 1 focus around the transit center and the college, but likes the theme of Alternative 2. She added that she agrees with the consultants concerning the Albertsons and the King County sites. Said it would also be helpful to see some examples of successful gateways.

Mr. Elliott said he was leaning toward Alternatives 2 and 3. Alternative 2 builds on the fact that the corridor is and has for many years been a major employment center. There is a lot of life left in many of the buildings in the study area, so any redevelopment will take many years to accomplish. He said he did not see the corridor as a housing center given its location close to the freeway. He said he also did not see major retail coming to the corridor. The area will likely remain the home of business parks that at the end of the day go quiet, though some improvements could be made to accommodate those who work in the area, including restaurants and coffee shops and some small retail uses. The corridor is a business area and a very valuable one. It is an excellent alternative to Factoria and the downtown, and as the economy improves it will continue to grow. Improvements with regard to traffic, transit and general connections are needed.

Mr. Pucher voiced his support for Alternatives 1 and 3 for the reasons highlighted by others. He said some retail and some mixed use on the Eastgate Plaza site would be a good idea. He agreed that allowing for additional building height would be the best approach. There should be a general scaling up for traffic entering Eastgate from Issaquah.

Councilmember Robertson said she could see positive benefits in all three of the action alternatives. With regard to housing, she said student housing near Bellevue College and transit-oriented development near the park and ride would work for the corridor. Eastgate certainly serves as a valuable business park for the city, and certainly functional improvements are needed. Getting traffic in and out of the corridor will be critical to the future success of the area. At the Council level, the key issues will be financial feasibility and mobility.

Mr. Ludtka commented that the new Lakemont roundabout will benefit that intersection

and agreed that it will help provide some excellent data. He pointed out, however, that the Lakemont roundabout will be completely different from what is being considered for 150th Avenue SE. With regard to the three action alternatives, he suggested that none of them on their own are the real answer; it will take a combination of the elements of each alternative to develop an actionable long-term plan. Housing in the corridor could work, particularly for the younger set that prefers to be in an urban setting, likes to use transit or walk to work, and who want restaurants, services and retail options nearby. Areas can change quickly; SODO in Seattle is a good example. The keys to the future success of the corridor will be density, which brings with it opportunities for open space; corridor character; and the integration of transportation and land use.

Ms. Bruce agreed that the concept of incentivization will be a major element. The corridor enjoys good access from all directions, and that fact argues in favor the concepts in Alternative 2. The streetscaping and mobility elements will be crucial, and the only way to fully achieve the vision will be to form partnerships with the state, Bellevue College, and private entities. Additional building height and density will be necessary to free up the land needed for a good streetscape. Some of the elements in Alternative 3 certainly should be incorporated, along with elements of Alternative 2.

Mr. Bohman commented that by definition the three action alternatives serve as bookends. To say one is favored over another is difficult to do given that each encompasses a different concept. There are elements in each of the alternatives that should be drawn together into a single cohesive proposal. He suggested Alternative 1 is too heavily skewed toward housing, which is not practical relative to what is already in place in the corridor and its current character, which is office. Alternative 2 is the most consistent with what is already on the ground. Large floor plate construction supports large employers such as Microsoft and T-Mobile which gravitate to the I-90 corridor because it is the only place in the greater Bellevue area where a concentration of large square footage office is supported. The answer to the question about how to achieve functional improvements and the potential for housing and retail is entirely predicated on density.

Ms. Courter Blanton said she favored Alternative 2 because of the economic vitality of the area. She said there are areas in Bellevue that are attractive to the younger urban crowd, including the downtown where there are restaurants and entertainment options. More of those options are set to be created in Bel-Red. To do the same in Eastgate would mean some existing employers would be pushed out. It makes sense to include housing to benefit Bellevue College, to improve the overall mobility of the area, and to create attractive gateways. She said she likes roundabouts and the benefits they offer.

Co-Chair Larrivee suggested that I-90 is both a curse and a blessing for the corridor. While it provides access to and from the area, it also is a challenge. There is currently no calming transition from high-speed freeway traffic to an environment in which people can feel safe living in, using and walking around in; that will be critical regardless of what the final alternative looks like. Regardless of the form the final alternative takes, Bellevue College should be central to the character of it. Bellevue College is a dominant institution of higher education on the Eastside and should be built on by allowing complimenting and synergetic uses as well as incubator space. As the area develops, it should have a level of self-containment that will not merely draw from surrounding areas; the traffic and movement of people within the area should come from the area itself. From that perspective, a combination of Alternatives 1 and 3 would be best.

Mr. Elliott said the center in which Albertsons is located is very well run, and with the demise of the Safeway across the freeway, it is the only grocery store serving the entire

area. Nearby residential areas have the choice of shopping there, in Issaquah, or in Factoria. The site could be enhanced, but largely it should be left alone. What makes the corridor so important is its access to Seattle and to areas to the east, north and south. It is situated at a major crossroad and is very likely to continue to serve as an office park.

4. Initiate Discussion of Preferred Alternative

Co-Chair Larrivee said he had not heard from the CAC a clear directive with regard to one alternative over another or with regard to a theme for the corridor. He said he picked up primarily on a call for a combination of Alternatives 1 and 3, but with a continuation of the area as a regional employment center with office uses.

Mr. Stanton said he had not gotten the impression anyone favored including large blocks of housing, only selective housing associated with the college or in mixed use developments.

Mr. Ludtka said because of the importance of the location a nod must be given to office uses in the two million square foot range. The area will not eventually become a major retail center, though some retail is needed, probably on the order of what is called for in Alternative 1. The notion of including industrial uses in the area should not be precluded or eliminated; rather the use should be enhanced so it can move on to the next generation, possibly in the 350,000 square foot range. Housing associated with the college and in mixed use developments should be on the order of 750 to 1000 units, but not to the degree outlined in Alternative 1. The commercial uses in the corridor need the support of additional hotel rooms, possibly 200 to 300 rooms.

Mr. Stokes commented that predicting how successful housing could be in the corridor would be difficult to do. The area is a prime place for people to be because it is conveniently located, and while housing adjacent to a freeway may not currently be desired, in the future it may be. What the area needs is a balance of uses ranging from commercial to housing to retail.

Mr. Stanton said the small floor plates in downtown Bellevue limits to some degree the number of potential tenants. Allowing for larger floor plates in Eastgate will provide a great deal more flexibility.

Ms. Welti questioned whether it was absolutely necessary to determine a theme for the corridor. Co-Chair Larrivee allowed that the question was a good one, but suggested that having a theme would help to guide the discussion. Ms. Welti said she agreed with the various points made about needing to pick and choose from among the three action alternatives. She suggested there appeared to be more agreement about the desired elements than about a particular label.

Mr. Stanton pointed out the diversity of the corridor. He noted that the customer base at Albertsons, and the bilingual tellers at Washington Federal, all highlight how diverse the area is. That fact should be kept in mind. He added that strong consideration should be given to finding a way to stub light rail to the transit center. A single mile stub of light rail would change the entire dynamic of the corridor. If that were to occur, housing would become viable.

5. Public Comment

Mr. Pat Callahan, Urban Renaissance Group, noted that the comments made by the CAC about the entire corridor are the same questions asked by the team working on the

Lincoln development plan. There is a market for office in the corridor. Between 2000 and 2011 a total of 1.1 million square feet of office was built in the corridor; more could have been constructed except for supply constraints. The problem certainly has not been on the demand side. An additional two million square feet of office is very doable. The Lincoln project is not next to residential but is intended to be friendly to residential; by going taller with parking underground, more green space can be created. At the same time, large floor plate buildings are needed. Expedia chose to locate in the corridor for that very reason, and others have done the same. By going with dual towers on the Lincoln site, a gateway statement will be created.

Ms. Welti asked about the connection between the Lincoln site and Bellevue College that is depicted in Alternative 1. Mr. Callahan said the long-range plan for the site includes a bolder redevelopment scheme that includes residential. In that view it would make sense to create a connection between the site and Bellevue College.

Mr. Jack McCullough spoke representing Beacon Partners. He referred to the parcel on the back side of the Sunset development immediately across from the main entrance to the park and ride lot and noted there are outstanding views from the site. The site could accommodate about 250,000 square feet of office with parking underneath. The site could also accommodate multifamily housing units, though the land would not be used as efficiently; depending on unit size, the site could accommodate some 250 units. Office will work on the site from a market standpoint; multifamily housing is less of a sure thing. What is needed is a zone that will yield the opportunity to go either way on the site.

6. Further Committee Discussion

Co-Chair Larrivee reminded the CAC members that the meeting on October 6 would begin at 5:00 p.m. rather than 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Bergstrom informed the group that the open house will be from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Robinswood House cabana. Whatever comes out of the meeting on October 6 will be presented to the public for input.

7. Adjourn

Co-Chair Larrivee adjourned the meeting at 7:46 p.m.